

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 14, 2016

Agenda Item: Keogh Ranch Conservation Easement Addition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

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Background

This project involves a 41-acre in-holding that lies in the middle of the existing Keogh Conservation Easement property (7,106 encumbered acres) located 15 miles north of Whitehall, MT. The in-holding used to be owned by the BLM but is now in the possession of the Fitzgerald family, who also owns the land encumbered by the FWP conservation easement.

The parcel is a prime residential development location. Residential subdivision has occurred less than 2 miles away at the southern boundary of the conservation easement. Because the in-holding is located in the middle of the conservation easement, the potential disturbance from residential development is significant.

The Keogh Conservation Easement comprises native shrub grassland habitats, intersected by Whitetail Creek and associated riparian habitat. The property includes breeding mountain plovers and supports the western most known prairie dog colony in Montana. It provides winter range for elk, mule deer and antelope. The ranch is enrolled in Block Management and provides hunting access for an average of 400 hunters annually. Hunttable species include elk, mule deer, antelope, mountain lion and upland game birds. In addition, they allow public fishing access to their reservoir. The conservation values and recreation opportunities could be impacted if this in-holding were developed.

Public Involvement Process & Results

There has been no other public involvement to date. Upon Commission endorsement, FWP will conduct appropriate public review and analysis.

Alternatives and Analysis

Alternatives to be analyzed are inclusion of this 41-acre parcel into the existing conservation easement held by FWP, or leave it out of the conservation easement (no action) with the potential for future development.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission endorse this proposal. Incorporating this 41-acre in-holding into the existing conservation easement will protect FWP's investment in this property by helping to maintain the integrity of the conserved habitats and associated recreational opportunities.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission endorse this addition to the Keogh Conservation Easement, allowing the Department to proceed with further work on this project.